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THE JOURNAL OF AMERICAN FOLK-LORE.

VOL. XVI. — OCTOBER-DECEMBER, 1903. — No. LXIII.

PRIMITIVE WOMAN AS POET.

IN his very interesting essay, "Woman's Share in Primitive Culture," Prof. O. T. Mason tells us how much the world is indebted to woman in the arts, in language, in sociology, in religion. In all ages woman has been, as she still is, "the conservator and teacher of religion." Prof. Mason's words are significant : —

"The idea of a *maker* or creator-of-all-things found no congenial soil in the minds of savage men, who manufactured nothing. But, as the first potters, weavers, house-builders were women, the idea of a divine creator as a moulder, designer, and architect originated with her, or was suggested by her. The three fates, Clotho, who spins the thread of life ; Lachesis, who fixes its prolongation ; and Atropos, who cuts this thread with remorseless shears, are necessarily derived from woman's work. The mother goddess of all peoples, culminating in the apotheosis of the Virgin Mary, is an idea, either originated by women or devised to satisfy their spiritual cravings." And we have, besides, the goddesses of all mythologies, emblematic of woman's beauty, her love, her devotion.

What shall we say of that art, highest of all human accomplishments, by which men have become almost as gods? The old-Greeks called the singer ποιητής, "maker," and perhaps from woman the first poets learned how to worship in noblest fashion that great *maker* of all whose poem is the universe.¹ Religion and poetry have ever gone hand in hand ; Plato was right when he said : "I am persuaded, somehow, that good poets are the inspired interpreters of the gods." So, with the art of song, as with religion, it may be, *Dux fœmina facti*.

To the mother beside the cradle, where lies her tender offspring, song comes as natural as speech itself to man. Fischer, a quaint German poet of the sixteenth century, beautifully expresses this idea : —

Wo honig ist, da samlen sich die fliegen,
Wo kinder sind, da singt man um die wiegen.

¹ *American Antiquarian and Oriental Journal*, vol. xi. (1889), pp. 1-3. See, also, *Woman's Share in Primitive Culture* (New York, 1894).

Lullabies are known in every land ; the mother's soul is everywhere poured forth in song. Ploss, whose books "Das Weib" and "Das Kind" are a perfect mine of information, well says : —

"The popular poetry (Volkspoesie) of all peoples is rich in songs whose texts and melodies the tender mother herself imagined and composed." ¹

But it is not in the nursery alone that woman appears as a poet. Of the Indians of Guiana, Schomburgk remarks : —

"Among almost all the known races of Guiana the old women take the place of the ancient bards and hand down the traditions, mythological and others, from one generation to another." ² And this statement may stand for many other primitive peoples the world over. With the Eskimo, women have something to do with poetry, for among these song-loving natives they are permitted to be sorcerers.³ Of the Kareya, an Indian tribe of California, Stephen Powers tells us : —

"Sometimes in a wild dithyrambic frenzy, men and women mingling together, they wildly leap and dance ; now each one chanting a different story, extemporized on the spot in the manner of the Italian *improvvisatore*, and yet keeping perfect time and now all uniting in a chorus." ⁴

The aborigines (now extinct) of Haiti, were noted for the *areitos* or legendary ballads, which were chanted to their national dances. Women composed these, as well as men, and the fame of one in particular has been preserved by the Spanish historians of the Indies. This was Anacoana, "The Flower of Gold" (so the name is said to signify), sister of Behecho, cacique or chief of Xaragua, and wife of Caonabo, chief of Maquana. This beautiful and accomplished woman, whose reputation as a poet was great amongst her own people, was inclined at first to favor the invaders, but, after succeeding her brother on his death, she appears to have turned against them. Anacoana, like many another aborigine whose virtues seemed to excel those of the conquerors, fell a victim to Spanish treachery. In 1503, together with other persons of importance, she was invited to an entertainment or festival by Don Nicolas de Orando, who hanged her and burned the house with her companions in it. Doubtless, if any of her sister-bards survived, the story of her untimely and cruel death would be told in song, long as the race lived.

To make even a brief study of the incantations, love-songs, and

¹ *Das Kind*, ii. 128.

² Schomburgk, ii. 320.

³ Reclus, *Primitive Folk*, p. 39 ; Boas, *Sixth Ann. Rep. Bur. of Ethnol.* p. 573.

⁴ *Contrib. to N. Amer. Ethnol.* vol. iii., Washington, 1877, p. 29. See, also, p. 35.

ballads of the American Indians, and to indicate the share taken by woman in their composition and preservation, would be a long task. Dr. A. S. Gatschet, in his elaborate study of the language and ethnology of the Klamath Indians of southwestern Oregon,¹ states that they have male and female conjurers, who in their incantations sing of the animals which they use as servants in the exercise of their profession, these being supposed to be sent out by them on various errands. The erotic songs of these Indians "include lines on signs of womanhood, courting, love sentiments, disappointments in love, marriage fees paid to parents, on marrying, and on conjugal life. Some love-songs have quite pretty melodies." Many of these seem to belong to women alone, and not a few are satiric, as with the Eskimo. One of these little poems, with a pretty tune, addressed by a young woman to her lover is (but the melody is lost in the English rendering): —

Why did you become estranged, estranged,
By running in neighbor's houses, estranged, estranged?

Another, still more melodious in its native garb, is the reproach of a newly married wife, whose husband has not even spread a skin on the damp ground, where she may rest: —

You say you are rich! and you don't even spread a wild-cat's skin!

A third is a girl's song. The Indians think that the haze or fog sometimes seen at sunrise is a sign that the earth is angry with men.

In the morning the Earth resounded,
Incensed at us was the Earth,
For, to kill us wanted the Earth.

These, and a large number like them, may be examined in detail in Dr. Gatschet's volumes, where Indian text and full explanations are given. Suffice it to say that under the rubric of "cooing and wooing" no fewer than fifty-eight of these very brief and primitive poems are there given, of which a third belong to girls and women.

Among the Lkungen or Songish Indians of the southeastern part of Vancouver Island, there are women conjurers, inferior in power to the male shamans.² These *sīōua*, as they are called, have a secret sacred language, handed down from one to another, besides dances and songs peculiar to themselves. At the festival held by the Nootka Indians, when a young girl has arrived at the age of puberty both men and women are hired to sing and dance. Dr. Boas records one of these songs:³

¹ *Contrib. to N. Amer. Ethnol.* vol. ii. pt. i., Washington, 1890, pp. 159, 175.

² Dr. F. Boas, *Sixth Report (Brit. Assoc.) on the Northwestern Tribes of Canada*, pp. 28, 29.

³ *Loc. cit.* p. 41.

I had a bad dream last night. I dreamt my husband took a second wife. Then I packed my little basket and I said before I left : There are plenty of men. Thus I dreamt.

Among the Kwakiutl tribe, girls, young women, and old women have separate secret societies from those of the men, and these, no doubt, have their own peculiar songs.¹

Among the Ojibwas or Chippewas there is the Midéwîwin, or grand society of shamans, to which women as well as men are permitted to belong. Dr. W. J. Hoffman has made a thorough study of this great secret association, and states that "as each Midé priest usually invents and prepares his own songs, whether for ceremonial purposes, medicine, hunting, exorcism, or any other use, he may frequently be unable to sing them twice in exactly the same manner."² The girls and women of the various Algonkian Indian tribes had their love-songs as well as their neighbors of Iroquois stock. Schoolcraft (for the western peoples) and Leland (for the eastern) have recorded many of these. We have, too, the songs of witches and unearthly maidens, who are well known to Indian mythology.

In an interesting article on "Native American Poetry," Dr. D. G. Brinton gives literal translations of two songs of Indian women.³ The first is sung by a Kioway mother, whose son had gone to war :

Young men there are in plenty,
But I love only one ;
Him I've not seen for long,
Though he is my only son.
When he comes, I'll haste to meet him,
I think of him all night ;
He too will be glad to see me,
His eyes will gleam with delight.

The other is an Aztec song, taken down from the lips of a girl in the Sierras of Tamaulipas : —

I know not whether thou hast been absent :
I lie down with thee, I rise up with thee,
In my dreams thou art with me.
If my eardrops tremble in my ears
I know it is thou moving within my heart.

These poems have often pretty conceits that even the bards of our own day would have no reason to be ashamed of.

Schoolcraft has published some attempts at verse by an educated Chippeway young woman in her native tongue, but most remarkable of all descendants of civilized Indians is Miss E. Pauline Johnson, whose poetic gifts are well known to literary circles in Canada and

¹ *Loc. cit.* p. 64.

² *Seventh Ann. Rep. Bur. of Ethnol.* pp. 143-300 ; p. 289.

³ *Essays of an Americanist*, pp. 284-304. See p. 293.

the United States. It is probable, however, that her talent comes more from her mother's English ancestry than from her Mohawk lineage.

But to pass on. Among the natives of the innumerable islands of the Pacific woman appears often as a singer. The Maoris of New Zealand had many poetesses. In his "Te Ika a Maui. New Zealand and its Inhabitants,"¹ Rev. Richard Taylor gives two specimens of their composition, but the sonorous yet soft Maori rhythm loses something in the translation. The first is a love-song by a young woman of the Nga-ti-kahununui tribe:—

The tears gush from my eyes,
My eyelashes are wet with tears;
But stay my tears within,
Lest you should be called mine.
Alas! I am betrothed (literally "my hands are bound"),
It is for Te Maunu,
That my love devours me.
But I may weep indeed,
Beloved one for thee.
Like Tinirau's lament
For his favorite pet,
Tutunui,
Which was slain by Ngae.
Alas!

These poems are often filled with mythological or historical allusion, like the one with which the verses just quoted close.

The second is the "Lament" of Uira, mother of a renowned Maori chief. She is dying, while her son is in the mountains, whither he has gone to seek red ochre. The mountain hides him from her.

The bright sunbeams
Shoot down upon
Tauwara, whose
Lofty ridge veils
Thee from
My sight. O Amo, my beloved,
Leave me, that my eyes
May grieve, and that
They may unceasingly mourn;
For soon must I descend
To the dark shore—
To my beloved who has gone before.

And soon the singer followed her husband, who had preceded her to the grave.

When Darwin reached Tahiti his arrival was sung by a young girl in four improvised strophes, which her fellow-maidens accompanied

¹ London, 1855. See pp. 138-145. Also, Waitz, *Anthropologie der Naturvoelker*, vi. 85. Hochstetter, p. 508.

in a pretty chorus.¹ Of the maiden of Paumotu (Low Archipelago) we are told that "in a dance, which she accompanies with a beautiful song of the same import, she can picture her longing for the absent lover, her resolve to follow him, and her joy at seeing him again." Among the natives of the Fiji Islands — cannibals though they were — women have been renowned as poets as well as men. Rowe mentions a noted one belonging to Thikombia-i-ra. In Hawaii they are also known, and Cheever in 1771 cites a Christian poem by a princess of the Sandwich Islands. In the Marianne Archipelago the women had a special song, which they accompanied with lively gestures and the music of little mussel-shells. On the islands of Uolea and Lukanor there were songs sung by women only, and some of the bathing songs are quite unknown to men. On another island the girls sang songs like these : —

The light of the moon,
The light, I like it.

Perhaps this moon befriended Banks,
Who came here to his friends.²

Among the aborigines of Peake River, Australia, when the youth — at puberty — has undergone the ceremony of tattooing and, his wounds having healed, is about to return to his fellows, a young girl selected for the purpose sings in her own way a song which she has composed, and amid dancing, merriment, and feasting the young man is welcomed back to his family and kin.³

We have further recorded the song of a woman of an Australian tribe, who has been abandoned by her husband for another, and the reply of the latter, the new wife : —

I.

Wherefore came you, Weerang,
In my beauty's pride,
Stealing cautiously,
Like the tawny boreang [native dog]
On an unwilling bride.
'T was thus you stole me
From one who woo'd me tenderly,
A better man he was than thee
Who having forced me thus to wed
Now so oft desert my bed.
Yang, yang, yang, yoh.

Oh where is he who won
My youthful heart,

¹ Waitz, vi. 180 ; Darwin, *Journ. Res.* (New York, 1846), ii. 180.

² Waitz, vi. 82, 180, 606 ; v. 90, 96, 108 ; vi. 90.

³ Ploss, *Das Kind*, ii. 421.

Who often used to bless
And call me loved one?
You, Weerang, tore apart
From his fond caress
Her whom you now desert and shun;
Out upon thee, faithless one!
Oh may the Boyl-las bite and tear
Her whom you take your bed to share.
Yang, yang, yang, yoh.

II.

O, you lying, artful one,
Wag away your dirty tongue!
I have watched your tell-tale eyes,
I've seen young — nod and wink
Oftener perhaps than you may think.¹

These are something like the nith-songs of the Eskimo, but after them a general row sometimes follows. The gestures accompanying the words are very significant and the effect upon the audience is exciting.

Crossing to Madagascar, we find Rochon² speaking of the Malagasy women thus:—

“While the Malegaches are at war their women sing and dance incessantly, throughout the whole day, and even during a part of the night. They imagine that these continual dances animate their husbands and increase their vigor and courage. They scarcely allow themselves to enjoy their meals. When the war is ended, they assemble at sunset and renew their singing and dancing, which always begin with much noise, and the sound of various instruments. Their songs are either panegyrics or satires, and appear to me to interest the spectators very much.”

Proyart³ says of the natives of Loango, Western Africa:—

“They have no songs composed, they make them off-hand; and take their subject from existing circumstances. The missionaries one day heard of a woman, who dancing on the occasion of her husband's death, deplored her lot and that of her children; she compared the defunct to the roof of a house the fall of which soon involves that of the whole edifice. ‘Alas!’ cried she, in her language, ‘the ridge has fallen; there lies the building, exposed to the weather; all is over; the ruin is unavoidable.’”

He also mentions another song of a grief-stricken woman:—

“One day when the missionaries were passing through a village, they heard of a mother whose son some robbers had stolen and sold

¹ Waitz, *op. cit.* vi. 758.

² *Visit to Madascar* (London, 1792), cited in Pinkerton, xvi. 747.

³ *History of Loango* (Paris, 1776), cited in Pinkerton, xvi. 575, 576.

as a slave to the Europeans. The woman, in the first transport of woe, sallies from her house dissolved in tears, holding her daughter by the hand ; she immediately fell to dancing with her, chanting her misfortune with most piteous and touching tone. Now she cursed the day when she became a mother ; she called her son, making imprecation against the wretches who had borne him away ; at other times she reproached for their most cruel avarice those European merchants who buy from all hands those who are offered to them as slaves."

The missionaries spoke of the effect which the poor woman's song had upon them.

Mungo Park,¹ the African explorer, tells how, when worn and weary, not knowing where to rest his head, he was guided by a Bambarra woman to her hut, — she happened to be returning from her labors in the field, — fed and lodged. Far into the night the female portion of the household busied themselves with the spinning of cotton, and —

"They lightened their labor by songs, one of which was composed extempore ; for I was myself the subject of it. It was sung by one of the young women, the rest joining in a sort of chorus. The air was sweet and plaintive and the words, literally translated, were these : —

The winds roared, and the rains fell. — The poor white man came and sat under our tree — he has no mother to bring him milk ; no wife to grind his corn.

Chorus. Let us pity the white man ; no mother has he, etc., etc."

The traveller adds that the good-souled woman was quite content with the two or three old brass buttons he was able to give her in return for her hospitality. Somewhat of the song-talent of the African negro lives in his kindred in America,² as many can tell who have had a colored nurse in the days gone by or have been present at the numerous festivals and religious exercises of these people. But few of them have approached this nursery-song of a woman of Balengi in Central Africa, regarding which it may be repeated *traduttore traduttore* : —

Why dost thou weep, my child ?

The sky is bright ; the sun is shining ; why dost thou weep ?

Go to thy father : he loves thee ; go, tell him why thou weepest.

What ! thou weepest still ! Thy father loves thee ; I caress thee :

Yet still thou art sad.

Tell me then, my child, why dost thou weep ?

Still we must not forget Phillis Wheatley, "the African Sappho," as some of her admirers have called her. Brought from Africa when

¹ *Travels* (London, 1810), cited in Pinkerton, xvi. 844.

² Williams, *History of the Negro Race in America*, i. 83.

but a child, — indeed her only clear remembrance of home was “that every morning early her mother poured out water before the rising sun,” — she was sold as a slave in Boston in 1761. The girl fortunately passed into the hands of a benevolent lady, Mrs. John Wheatley, under whose daughter’s instruction she made great advances in education. Having acquired a good knowledge of English, she turned her attention to Latin, afterwards translating one of Ovid’s tales. This translation was published in Boston and afterwards republished in England and favorably commented upon by not a few critics. Her master emancipated her when she was twenty years of age, and soon after, her health necessitating a sea-voyage, she went to England and was welcomed and fêted to her heart’s content. Society received her with open arms, the press praised her, she took London by storm. In 1773 her poems (120 pp., sm. octavo) were published in England, with a dedication to the Countess of Huntingdon, who together with Whitefield and the Earl of Dartmouth had been amongst her correspondents while in America. Accompanying the little volume, which contained thirty-nine pieces, was also a strong recommendation signed by the governor and lieutenant-governor of Massachusetts, as well as by prominent clergymen and citizens of Boston. Phillis returned to America just in time to be present at the deathbed of her benefactor, whose husband and daughter quickly followed her to the grave. After the marriage of their son, the talented negress was left to her own resources, and in an evil hour accepted the hand of a negro of Boston named Peters. The marriage was unfortunate, her husband was jealous and harsh, and in 1784, Phillis Wheatley, whose health seems never to have been very good, died, mourned by all who knew her.¹

Others of her race have sought the muses since, but none has ever been so widely recognized and esteemed. Of her successors, we can only mention Charlotte L. Fortune (afterwards Mrs. Dr. Grimke), who coming to Salem, Mass., in 1854, was valedictorian (in verse) of her class at school, though she had to compete with white male students, and who contributed to the columns of the “Atlantic Monthly,” no mean honor for a woman of African race.

But let us consider now for a short time some races that have generally attained a much higher civilization than those we have been latterly discussing.² In Japan there were poetesses, and the Princess Irge, born about 858 A. D., produced works of great repute. China, too, had her women of letters and, indeed, an old legend as-

¹ Williams, *op. cit.* i. 197–202.

² For information more detailed than that given here of many poetesses of various peoples, see Adam’s *Cyclopædia of Female Biography*, London, 1869, which the writer has found useful in preparing this article.

cribes to a woman the invention of the poetic art. From India come the bayadères and nautch-girls, whose dancing and singing talents are well known. From India came originally also, some authorities hold, the Gypsies, whose women throughout Europe are known for their love-songs and fortune-telling rhymes. The market-women and boat-women of Hither and Farther India have their peculiar songs. Indeed, throughout the Orient woman is a dancer and a singer. Song belongs to her, whether she be patiently toiling at her domestic labors, busy in the field, or striving to soothe and caress her lord and master in the harem. Among the Semitic races woman has taken no small share in song. In the Bible we have preserved, or referred to, several compositions of women. There is the song of rejoicing of Miriam:—

Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. (Exod. xv. 21, 22.)

Simple and spontaneous, those pæans of victory, had we them all, would rise above even Moore's immortal lines in imitation and expansion of the Hebrew original.

In the Book of Judges we are told how Deborah, the wife of Lapidoth, judged Israel under a palm-tree on Mount Ephraim for many years. How, after the Canaanitish yoke had been cast off, this "mother in Israel," together with Barak, the son of Abinoam, took up a song of rejoicing, which has caused Coleridge to become most eloquent in praise of "the Hebrew Boadicea." There is, too, the song of Hannah (1 Sam. ii. 1). And last, but not least, we have the divine song of the Virgin, the mother of Jesus (Luke i. 46 ff.). Besides these and others hinted at, we know that warlike songs and hymns of sacred rejoicing were not the only ones which the voices of Palestinian women raised to heaven. Jesus himself, with that felicity of illustration which marks his recorded words, taking his beautiful figure from an humble source, once said: "Two [women shall be] grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken and the other left," and we may be sure that then, as now, the villages of the Holy Land were vocal with the songs of working-women.

So also with the Arabs;¹ even the Bedouin of the desert have their poetesses. The women of the mountain-region of Sinai were wont to sing their own praises in strains like these:—

O women of the tribe of Aleygat, there is nothing like unto us
Except heaven; but the men are the earth upon which we tread.

Of the love-songs of the Bedouin maidens the traveller Burckhardt could obtain no specimen, since they were known to the women alone.

¹ Klemm, *Kulturgeschichte*, iv. 147, 167; Burckhardt, p. 68.

The songs sung by women on festive occasions, especially in the evening, are called Osamer or Asamer, and are usually rendered by choruses of from six to ten. Some of the women's songs are not accompanied by dances. Of the Asamer Featherman says: "The words [are] appreciative of acts of generosity and deeds of valor. The inspiring effect which they produce is so powerful that the warriors will impetuously rush forward to meet the enemy, fearless of death; and when returning from the field of battle the maidens' asamer of welcome will prove an ample reward for the dangers they have encountered and the hardships they have endured."¹ A celebrated poet of this people was "the Sappho of the Desert," Szarda, who belonged to the great tribe of Schararat.²

Much valuable information regarding Arabian women is to be found in the interesting volume of Rev. Dr. Jessup.³ He tells us: "The poetesses of the Arabs are numerous and some of them hold a high rank. Their poetry was impromptu, impassioned, and chiefly of the elegiac and erotic type" (p. 4). The author also states that in a book written by an Arabian are "the names of twenty Arab women who improvised poetry, the chief ones being Leila, Leila el Akhyaliyeh, Lubna, Zernab, Afra, Hind, May, Jenûb, Hubaish, Zarifeh, Jernileh, Remleh, Lotifeh. Their poetry has more than once been compared to the "Song of Solomon" for passionate eloquence, as Dr. Jessup remarks; and if it be true, as some critics hold, that this "Song of Songs" is really an anthology, we may believe some parts of it at least were the product of female genius.

One of the oldest Arabian poetesses was Zarifeh, who flourished in the second century, A. D. Another was Rakâsh sister of the king of Hira. The most celebrated is El Khunsa, a contemporary of Mohammed, to whom she recited her verses. She composed elegies upon her two brothers who were warriors, and these are among the choicest pieces of Arabian verse. Dr. Jessup gives the following "quite literal" translation of lines which are among those which have given her the title of "princess of Arabian poetesses: "

Ah, time has its wonders; its changes amaze;
It leaves us the tail while the head it slays;
It leaves us the low while the highest decays;
It leaves the obscure, the despised, and the slave
But of honored and loved ones, the true and the brave,
It leaves us to mourn o'er the untimely grave.
The two new creations, the day and the night,
Though ceaselessly changing, are pure as the light;
But men change to error, corruption, and blight.

¹ *Social Hist. of Mankind, Aramæans*, i. 378, 379.

² Klemm, *op. cit.* p. 169.

³ *The Women of the Arabs*, New York, 1873.

It is said that "the poet Nabzhal erected for her a red leather tent at the fair of Okaz, in token of honor, and in the contest of poetry gave her the highest place above all but Maymûn, saying to her: 'If I had not heard him, I would say that thou didst surpass every one in poetry. I confess that you surpass all women.' To which she haughtily replied: 'Not the less do I surpass all men.'"

El Khunsa seems to have been rather masculine in temper and none too delicate.

Another poetess was Abbassah, sister of the famed Haroun al Raschid, whose treatment of her lover, his vizir Giafar, is one of the blackest spots upon his escutcheon. After the execution of her husband she was banished from court and wandered about in poverty and want, telling in song the story of her misfortunes. Some of her verses are preserved.

Before treating of the Moors in Spain, mention must be made of the songs of the shepherdesses of the Guanches, the aboriginal inhabitants of the Canary Islands.¹ Chief of the poetesses who were of Moorish birth in Spain, is Alphaizuli of Seville, called "The Arabian Sappho." She lived in the eighth century and some of her works are to be found in the library of the Escorial. Another Spanish poetess, of the twelfth century, was Aisha, "whose poems and orations were frequently read with applause in the Royal Academy at Cordova." Many Spanish women, also, who were not of Moorish extraction, have cultivated the muses. They had their share in the popular ballads for which Spain was celebrated, and in the early chronicles we find mention of "joglaressas," or female ballad singers. Women of letters flourished at the court of Ferdinand and Isabella, and Santa Teresa de Jesus (d. 1582) made her mark in sacred poetry. The Spanish colonies in America had also their poetesses, and in our own century in Cuba Gertrudis de Avellaneda is well known.

It would indeed have been strange if the classic lands of southern Europe, with their goddesses and muses, their sirens, vestal virgins, priestesses and oracles, their dancers and Bacchantes, had had no women poets.

The isles of Greece, the isles of Greece !
Where burning Sappho lived and sung,

had poetesses beside her. Phantasia, daughter of Nicanchus, of Memphis (Egypt), in the twelfth century B. C., is said by Chiron to have written "a poem on the Trojan war and another on the return of Ulysses to Ithaca." These poems were deposited in Memphis, where, according to the same authority, Homer saw them and copied most of the Iliad and the Odyssey. But this story is most likely mythical.

¹ Featherman, *op. cit.* p. 33.

Other Grecian poetesses were : Megalostrata (*circa* 668 B. C.), the friend of Alcman, of whose existence we are aware through the satires directed against her by envious rivals ; Damophila (*circa* 610 B. C.), wife of Damophilus the philosopher and related to Sappho, whose rival she was, wrote a poem on Diana and many love-songs ; Telesilla of Argos, whom the oracle advised to study the muses, and who by her song encouraged the Argive women at the siege of Pamphiliacum ; Cleobule, daughter of Cleobulus, prince of Lindos (*circa* 594 B. C.), who achieved considerable reputation for her riddles and enigmatic verses.

But the greatest of all were Sappho (end of seventh century B. C.), Erinna, and Corinna (*circa* 500 B. C.). Sappho, the most celebrated of the poetesses of antiquity, was born either at Mitylene or at Eresos in the island of Lesbos. About her little can be said with certainty. While her immorality has doubtless been exaggerated by hostile critics, her life must have been loose and passion-driven. The beautiful story of her leap from the Leucadian rock, when she failed to induce Phaon to return her love, is now shown to rest upon no good authority. She appears to have been the head and front of a *côterie* of poetesses at Mitylene. Of her poems, which were divided into nine books, but two odes, one of which is to Aphrodite, and a few short fragments, are preserved. The sapphic strophe, which Horace often employed, is named from her.

Erinna, friend of Sappho, a native of Telos (or, as some say, of Rhodes), died at the early age of nineteen, notwithstanding which her verses are said to have challenged comparison with those of Homer. Of her chief poem but four lines are extant, besides which she is represented by but a single epigram. Corinna, of whose works but a few fragments remain, a lyric poetess, native of Tanagra in Bœotia, was the instructor of Pindar and is said to have been victorious over him in a contest of song.

Coming down to the days of the Eastern Empire, we find the poetess Eudocia. Daughter of an Athenian sophist, this talented woman married the Emperor Theodosius II., and exercised a great influence at his court. Shortly before his death, however, she lost favor and was forced to retire to Jerusalem, where she lived a life of charity, dying in 460 A. D. She wrote a panegyric of the victories of Theodosius over the Persians, a poem on St. Cyprian, and some paraphrases of Scripture. A poem on the life of Christ has been doubtfully attributed to her also. In the present century the folk-songs of the shepherdesses and market-women of Greece and Calabria show that the old spirit is living yet, while, like other modern European nations, Greece has her share of literary women.

An Italian legend attributes to Carmenta or Nicostrata, an ancient

poetess of Latium, the introduction of religion, poetry, and agriculture. She seems to have been prophetess, bard, and culture-heroine. Cicero speaks of a *Flamen Carmentalis*, whose charge was the rites instituted by her, while Vergil, in the eighth book of the *Æneid*, tells how she was remembered by an altar and other honors. Popular etymology would have it that the Latins called verses *carmina* (as we now call some of them *charms*) from her name, but the appellation *Carmenta* is better said to have been given her on account of the oracular power with which she was credited.

Critics reckon that in the ancient world there were ten sibyls or inspired prophetesses of the gods — the Babylonian, Libyan, Delphian, Cimmerian, Eyrthrean, Samian, Cumæan, Trojan, Phrygian, and Tiburtine. Italy possessed the most renowned of these, that of Cumæ in Campania, who dwelt in a cave. She is described by Vergil in the *Æneid*, and the story of the sale of the Sibylline books of verses to Tarquin is well known. Three of them, only, came into the hands of the Romans, but these were said to be filled with oracular words and prophecies. Altogether very little is known of these wonderful women who spoke as mouthpieces of the divine powers. They had many names; the sibyl of Cumæ is best known. Italian poetesses of later ages were: Perilla, the daughter of Ovid, and Sulpitia, in the first century A. D., who has been termed "the Roman Sappho." In the Middle Ages and during the Renaissance Italy was celebrated for her literary women, many of whom were poets — and some of them poets of merit. The land of Dante is far famed for its *improvisatori*, but there were *improvisatrici* as well, for her daughters as well as her sons have been renowned for their ability to compose impromptu verses. The most gifted of these in recent years was Signora Mazza. Others were Maddalena Morelli Fernandez, the original of Madame de Stæel's "Corinne," Teresa Bandellini (d. 1837), Rosa Taddei, and Giovannina Milli. In the songs of sunny Italy — judged by this showing — woman has no mean share, to say nothing of the hundreds of humble ones whose names even are not recorded.

Schafarik, the great Slavic scholar, has said that "wherever there is a Slavonic woman there also is a song;" Morfill states that "in the old-fashioned days the ladies were lulled to sleep by their female serfs, who narrated to them these quaint legends;" and Pushkin, the chief of Russian poets, caught not a little of his inspiration from the tales told by his nurse. Of the songs in Verkovich's "National Songs of the Macedonian Bulgarians," the author tells us that "270 were written down from the recitation of a woman, named Dafina, at Seres, in Macedonia." Where women take so large a share in the

preservation of poetry, we might expect them to have something to do with its making.¹

Among the Finns, who have given to the world, in the *Kalevala*, an epic worthy to rank with the *Iliad*, the *Nibelungenlied*, and the *Chanson de Roland*, woman is bard as well as wife and mother. Crawford, whose translation of the *Kalevala* is the first complete one we have in English, says: "The natural speech of this people is poetry. The young men and maidens, the old men and matrons, in their interchange of ideas unwittingly fall into verse."²

Bücher³ devotes a special section of his study of "Work and Rhythm" to "The Work and Poetry of Women." He points out that there early fell to the lot of women such laborious and monotonous toil as the grinding of cereals, baking bread, preparation of meats and drinks, pottery, spinning, etc., the result of which, in view of the relationship of work and rhythm, was to make women "song-creative" to a larger extent than men, and earlier, perhaps, in time. All over the world primitive women sing at their work, and in the early stages of human culture the singer is composer and poet as well. Out of the work-song grows later the deed-song. The examples of Miriam and Deborah are not isolated. Large as is primitive woman's share in the songs of victory and heroism, it is even larger in songs of death, lamentations over the departed and eulogies of those who have left this world.

The *nænia* of the old Romans and the death-laments of the modern Corsicans are alike woman's work. Her share in the poetry of festal occasions among the Balkan peoples to-day is large, and it is from women that the collectors of folk-poetry obtain the most of their records. Verkovich, as noted, obtained from a single old woman 270 out of the 335 numbers of his collection of Bulgarian folk-songs, and the brothers Miladinov obtained 150 songs from one young girl. The female character of a very large portion of the folk-poetry of the Finns, Esths Letts, Lithuanians, South Slavs, etc., is noteworthy. According to Bücher, of the 1202 numbers in the collections of Esthonian, Lettic, and Lithuanian songs by Neus, Ulmann, and Nesselmann, 678, or more than one half, are woman's songs.

To the ancient Celtic races bards who were women and prophetesses were not unknown. In Ireland, as in Israel, they were "judges and expounders of the law" not infrequently, and St. Brigit, abbess of Kildare in the time of St. Patrick, had her heathen predecessors, druidesses, and "learned women."⁴ In France, among her *Trouvères*

¹ Morfill, *Slavonic Literature* (London, 1883), pp. 68, 69, 127.

² *The Kalevala* (New York, 1888), vol. i. p. xxvi.

³ *Arbeit und Rhythmus* (Leipzig 1899).

⁴ Bryant, *Celtic Ireland* (London, 1889), p. 86.

and Troubadours, descendants of these women bards, by lineage of song if not of birth, are found, and she owes, perhaps, not a little of the literary culture of many of her women of the present day to the same source. Among the earlier of these were Laura of Avignon and her aunt, of whom a critic says that they were renowned "par leur habilité à romancer en toute sorte de rythme Provençale ;" Clara d'Anduse, Queen Eleanor of Guienne, the Countess of Champagne, and the Countess of Flanders. We have also Marie de France and the Comtesse de Die. Love-songs and choral songs innumerable the ancient peasantry of Gaul had as their descendants have to-day. Indeed, the Council of Châlons, in 650 A. D., endeavored to suppress them, as that of Agdi more than a century before had tried to do with those of the men. The good Bishop of Arles called the songs of the men and women, sung together in the fields, "diabolical," yet they were such as probably our British ancestors sang with glee in Cæsar's time.¹

To Wyrd (the Urd of Scandinavian mythology) our Anglo-Saxon forefathers gave the attribute of vaticination, and the mothers of the Teutonic race, who preserved for us the charming wealth of tales revealed by the brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen, must have had some poets amongst them. Like the Celts they inherited from their Aryan ancestors choral-dance, love-song, and ballad. But records of them are few and far between. Scherer² tells us that the maiden greeted her lover in words like these : "I wish thee as much joy as there is foliage in spring ; I wish thee as much love as the birds find delight and food ; I wish thee as much honor as the earth bears grass and flowers." The full share of woman in the development of the poetic literature of England and Germany may never be known, but in the love-songs and riddles of the earliest ages her invention bore its due part among a people whose laws even were alliterative and poetical. Of early German poetesses two are especially noteworthy : Roswitha, the nun of Gandersheim (*circa* 965) is accounted the first German woman to write verse and the first dramatist since the Roman epoch. Her compositions were in Latin. The first woman to write German verse was the nun Ava (died in Austria, 1127 A. D.), who wrote three religious poems. Worthy descendants were Elizabeth Cruciger, a writer of stirring Lutheran hymns in the later days of the Reformation, and Anna Louisa Karschin, a poetess of the eighteenth century, styled by some of her admiring contemporaries the "Prussian Sappho."

Of the women poets of England and of modern Europe and Amer-

¹ Tiersot, *Histoire de la Chanson populaire en France* (Paris, 1889), p. 41.

² *Hist. Germ. Lit.* vol. i. p. 12.

ica, it is not intended to speak in this essay, devoted almost entirely to the consideration of primitive and ancient peoples. Suffice it to say that the old bards of centuries ago have in some of them noble and worthy peers.

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